

SYSTEM AND METHOD FOR PROVIDING SHOPPING AIDS AND INCENTIVES TO CUSTOMERS THROUGH A COMPUTER NETWORK

ABSTRACT OF THE DISCLOSURE

5 A system and method for delivering purchasing incentives and a variety of other retail shopping aids through a computer network, such as by E-mail over the Internet or the World Wide Web. Customers (10) of retail stores can establish a bi-directional communication link with the system, log in (16) to the system, and then elect to browse among available purchasing incentive offers (18, 22), or elect to explore other shopping aids, such as a shopping list generator (26), a recipe center (30), or simply elect to claim a product rebate or to receive product information. If the customer elects to have product information or rebate information delivered, only minimal customer identification is required. For purchase incentives redeemable at retail stores, the customer must provide identification information and must also designate a retailer (12) at which the purchasing incentive can be exercised. For receipt of focused incentives based on the customer's past shopping behavior, the customer must also supply a unique customer id., such as a check cashing card number or credit card number, used for in-store purchases. For delivery of a product sample, the customer's name and address must be supplied. The system merges this customer-supplied information (270) with other purchase incentive data (272) and creates a printable graphical image of the purchasing incentive (282) for transmission to the customer. In an alternate embodiment of the invention, the purchase incentive is not transmitted directly to the customer. Instead, the terms of the incentive are transmitted electronically to the retail store (310) designated by the customer, who receives either a token (316) to present at the store or an advisory message. In yet another embodiment of the invention, incentives may be targeted to specific consumers based on a consumer purchase history (502), and transmitted to consumers' computers (510) using electronic mail addresses stored in a consumer database (506), or using a "personal page" in the computer network, established for each consenting consumer.